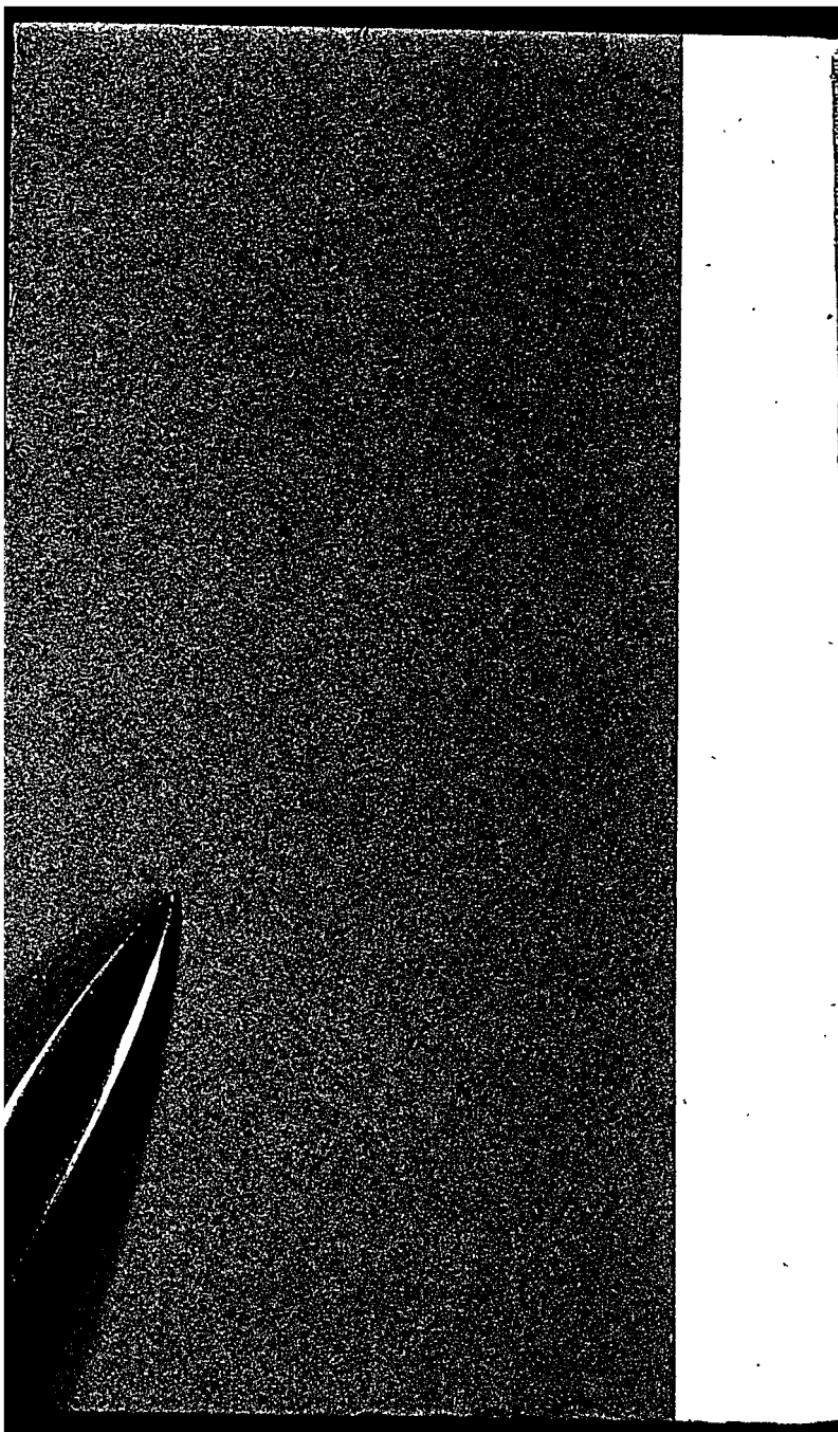


Palmer, George Alfred
Madam Verite at Bath

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MADAM VERITE AT BATH

An Original Comedy in One Act

by

GEORGE ALFRED PALMER



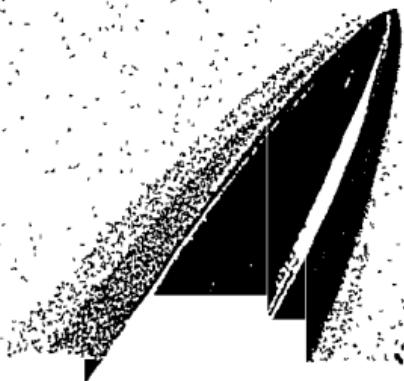
REGINA, SASKATCHEWAN
CHRISTMAS, 1932



To John de Nelson

Best Wishes & Regards

Geo. Palmer



MADAM VERITE AT BATH



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MADAM VERITE AT BATH

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

by

George Alfred Palmer



Cast

Lady Constance Pettiwood

Peggy, her maid

Sir Harry Pettiwood



The action of the play takes place in ye ancient citie of Bath and the period is about the middle of the 18th. century.

The costumes and furnishings should be suitable to the period.

The first performance was given at the Balfour Grill, Regina, Sask., Canada, on September 22, 1932, with the following cast:

Lady Constance *Mrs. Mary Lake*

Peggy *Mrs. Marion Robinson*

Sir Harry *Geo. A. Palmer*

MADAM VERITE AT BATH

SCENE: Bath. An elegant room in the house of Sir Harry Pettiwood. There is a set-out breakfast table, centre up stage, at which LADY CONSTANCE is seated. A pretty elaborate sofa is down right. A window (open) at the back looks down on to the street below and there are two doors, right and left, upstage. One of the several chairs is placed left centre.

LADY CONSTANCE. (*Tinkling a small china bell as she calls*) Peggy!

PEGGY. (*With tray, enters by left door*) At your service, ma'am. (*Curtseys*).

LADY CON. You may clear away, Peggy.
PEGGY. Thank you, ma'am. (*She curtseys again*).

(*LADY CONSTANCE rises, comes down right and seats herself on sofa. From the bosom of her dress, she draws a folded note—of blue paper and reads.*)

LADY CON. "Two pairs of damask gloves for Lydia—Chinee silk scarf for Amander—Tortoiseshell comb for Lesbia!". The note is in my spouse's own hand, discovered on his dressing table, thrown indifferently there, I'll warrant, assuming himself safe and secure in my complete trust in him. What can this signify? Presents for Lydia, Amander and Lesbia, names of my reputed best friends. Why should Sir Harry buy presents for them? Ha! if not in return for favours granted, what then? O, odious thought! Are these old friends of my bosom likely vipers to that bosom's peace?

(*PEGGY, who has been putting the breakfast things on the tray she brought in, casts sly inquisitive glances at her mistress*).

Lud! And must I practise a blind wifely complaisance? Is it possible Sir Harry has become infected with the baneful philandering air of Bath and his frank and honest face is the mask of the rake and covert libertine? Kind Heaven! grant me a wifely patience and—and—Hem! and save me from any of those teasing favourable opportunities offered to injured wives to retaliate upon perfidious husbands!

(Peggy has gathered the breakfast things on her tray and is about to leave the room.)

Oh, Peggy! Put down your tray for a while. Come here. *(PEGGY puts tray back on table and curtseys.)* Come closer. Hem! Peggy, I've always been a kind mistress and even indulgent?

PEGGY. None could be kinder, Lady Constance.

LADY CON. *(Airily)* Certainly, I'm not more abusive than is allowable in our ladies of quality. Am I, Peggy?

PEGGY. Bless you, ma'am, you have neither swore at me nor called me any of those mortal hard names for two whole days.

LADY CON. Have I not, really? I had quite forgotten.

PEGGY. Nor boxed my ears even, for a whole week.

LADY CON. Neither have I. Hem! but I must not spoil a good maid by a mistaken excess of good temper.

PEGGY. It is three weeks, come next Friday, since you threw the last piece of china at me.

LADY CON. So! Well, the weather has been exceptionally fine for the season of the year and my engagements have not been too provoking. Nevertheless, I am much obliged to you, Peggy, for keeping so strict account of my tantrums, yet, at the same time, you don't confide these items of your private diary to my Lady Ask-much's maid, next door, do you?

PEGGY. Never, your ladyship, never.

LADY CON. No. Because, if the news of my excessive good nature got abroad, I should immediately find myself under the censorship of the greatest of all the great beaux of Bath, for the city of Bath, Peggy, is the one place in the kingdom where no lady, with any pretence of breeding, is permitted to neglect the constitutional exercise of her bad tempers on fitting and frequent occasions.

PEGGY. Sure, ma'am, it is everywhere allowed that patience is the mark of low breeding.

LADY CON. Undoubtedly!

PEGGY. Ladies of fashion, with all their cares, cannot be expected to have the patience of ordinary mortals, if they did have, why, madam, all distinctions in society would be gone.

LADY CON. Lud! Peggy, that is very true. It must be the prerogative of Civility to be uncivil when it pleases. Our ladies of Bath must preserve their privilege to abuse their servants, seeing our gentlemen of Bath will persist in spoiling them with silly gallantries and encouraging them in a parcel of forward airs. Which reminds me: Sir Harry hasn't broken his malacca on a single one of you for months.

PEGGY. No, no, he hasn't, ma'am.

LADY CON. Um! You also have it down in your diary, Peggy, how the beaux in their gay moments, notice our maids?

PEGGY. ~~O, my lady, I have no eyes for the gentlemen.~~

LADY CON. No. ~~And no ears for their whispered gallantries?~~ Now, Sir Harry Pettiwood,--

PEGGY. Sir Harry Pettiwood!

LADY CON. I said, Sir Harry Pettiwood, Girl, why do you echo me?

PEGGY. I—I don't know, my lady. (She curtseys and drops her eyes.)

LADY CON. Hem! Well, have you not kept as good account of his, er—pleasant morning's greetings, his harmless little flatteries of the good looks of my maids, as you have done of my tempers?

PEGGY. Sir Harry is always a most civil and reserved gentleman and—

LADY CON. (Rises) Civil—reserved! Poof! You say that in tone and manner of certain wishful ladies of Bath in their impatience and disappointment at the tardiness of a desirable gallant.

PEGGY. Your ladyship misconstrues me.

LADY CON. Lud! girl, I would rather learn how your master misconstrues you. Come, come, Peggy, you have confessed to finding a good mistress in me, come tell me, quite in confidence; you must have seen your master warmed with wine and gay with mirth,—tell me how amorous is he in his mirth?

PEGGY. Forgive me, mentioning it, ma'am, but I have only seen him amorous with one lady.

LADY CON. Yes, yes, who?

PEGGY. Your own self, ma'am. (Curtseys)

LADY CON. Little fool! (She takes a turn or two down stage) But, you haven't quenched my humour for questioning yet. Will you not tell me, Peggy,— tell me as a pretty girl who knows her own engaging beauty: Does Sir Harry never buss you on the cheek? (Peggy shakes her head) ever so lightly? (Peggy again shakes her head) yes? quite paternally, of course, as any gay master might? (Peggy shakes again) It is an old custom in old families, from the time of William the Conqueror, you know, Peggy, and is therefore part of the unwritten constitution of England. (Peggy again shakes her head. Lady Constance advances and takes hold of her hand.) Not when he passes you on the staircase-landing where the stained glass casts a curious shadow of the Knight Launcelot?

PEGGY. No, my lady, never there.

LADY CON. Never there. Where then?

PEGGY. Nowhere.

LADY CON. Oh!—certain he catches at your waist when he comes upon you alone in the dark linen closet?

PEGGY. No, no. Never madam.

LADY CON. When you are going up stairs before him with lighted candles for the bed-rooms, does he never playfully catch at your ankle?

PEGGY. I assure you, madam, he never does that.

LADY CON. Um! I know something of these courtly reserved gentlemen—something their own mirrors don't disclose. You have very trim ankles, Peggy.

(Peggy does not answer, but shakes her head.)

Oh, yes, you have, and Sir Harry is bigger fool than I took him for to refuse the invitation of cherry lips, to be insensible to a breath savoring of Devonshire cream, to be sightless before a Venus form and ankles that Diana—

PEGGY. Your ladyship is making merry of me.

LADY CON. No, no, I'm marvelling why he has not made merry with thee rather than with three pots of stale curds—

PEGGY. *(Very quickly)* Whatever does your ladyship mean? Three pots of stale curds—and whey?

LADY CON. A trio of antiquated sirens, because their charms have become too musty to ensnare even gouty old bachelors of Bath in their seventies, they must angle for other women's husbands. Merry with you, Peggy? O dear Lud! It's me, Peggy, he is making merry with. Presents for his minions—

PEGGY. Did your ladyship say minions? Sir Harry never gave me a present that your ladyship did not hand me yourself.

LADY CON. You, Peggy? No, I don't mean you. To you, he would give a misely kiss or an embrace as of a niggardly guardian. No, no, no! His presents go to three antiquated crocodiles that infest the waters of Bath. Crocodile Lydia; Crocodile Amander; Crocodile Lesbia! Harridans all!

(She has taken the blue note from her bosom and is holding it above her head.)

PEGGY. Shall I, ma'am,—

LADY CON. Um—um—m?

PEGGY. Shall I bring you, madam, the box which Lord Wishful left for you?

LADY CON. Box! Lord Wishful! Why should he leave me a box?

PEGGY. That your ladyship can discover from a letter which he charged me deliver to you alone. *(She curtseys.)*

LADY CON. A letter—from him! Faugh! the intolerable fop!

(She pushes PEGGY aside and goes over to left with Peggy following her and holding out to her a pink letter. She paces around to right and suddenly stops.)

Let me see that letter, girl?

(She hesitatingly takes it from Peggy and turns down stage. Peggy curtseys and leaves quickly by door, left.)

LADY CON. *(Holding letter at arm's length.)* I divine the contents—Opportunity! O hideous recollection of a horrid thought! 'Tis Wishful's crest and seal! Shall I read it? No, I ought not. I will not read it; I guess at its perfidy. *(She seats herself on the sofa, places the letter on her lap and sighs.)* Hem! I will open it. *(She very gingerly breaks the seal and slowly unfolds the letter. After a little hesitation, she braces herself and reads):* "My dearest Lady Constance—*(The familiar fool!)* I would I could address thee by that choice and

classic name I have sorted out to suit your enslaving charms. (*Hah!*) My heart is at thy feet—a great man's heart at thy tiny feet—(*A great fool's and a rogue's. I would it was the tiny feet!*) How the dear feet, masked in their sweet Persian slipper, coquetted with my silver buckled shoes in the dance! — (*Hah!*) Dear Goddess! Grant your servant one felicitous hour to tell with his lips what this demn'd sputtering goosequill so lamely declares: that I am your maimed and manacled slave. (*I wish his head stuck full of his foolish goosequills—full as a porcupine's tail!*) Your eyes reveal your feeling heart, your smile warms me to a boldness. (*O, his impudence would assail Olympus!*) Grant me that rendezvous—(*O!*) which by every motion you have encouraged—(*Oh!*) a meeting, in the Dutch summer-house, by the walnut tree—(*Oh! Oh!*) tonight—alone—, *Oh! Oh!* When Sir Harry is deep at his cards and deeper in his wine. Yours, as you have made him, *WISHFUL.*" Oh! Oh! Oh! A very Pagan letter—a very vile profession of a viler love. Love! this is not love, it is a scandalous jest at the tenderest passion. Opportunity! How the word rises and gibbers like a horrid ghost! And this—this letter to come—at this moment—when I am at outs with my husband. Let opportunity ever come in the shape of such a letter, then every jealous woman angry at her husband is saved.

(Enter PEGGY, with a small silk-covered box)

PEGGY. Lord Wishful's present, ma'am.
(Curtseys)

LADY CON. His present, did you say? Well, you shall see how I receive his present and all else he has the impertinence to send me. (*She goes over to window and throws the box out, into the street.*) When he presses you with his next guinea, tell him, without modification of circumstances, how his first present was received. (*She reseats herself*)

PEGGY. I will, my lady. (*She curtseys and retires to table.*) Madam, I hear Sir Harry ascending the stairs.

LADY CON. (*Rises*) I will retire for a few moments to regain my calm and prepare myself to meet my husband's usual morning blandishments. Perfidious traitor! Peggy, tell him, I will be ready very shortly to receive him.

(*She disappears by door, right, but immediately sticks her head out*)

And, Peggy,—fetch me the cherry-brandy. (*She disappears.*)

(*Enter SIR HARRY PETTIWOOD, humming a tune, by left door. Peggy curtseys and then would pass him, but he catches her waist and then holds both her hands at arm's length.*)

SIR HARRY. Ha, ha! As dew-fresh as the early daisy.

PEGGY. My mistress is in her boudoir, sir. She bade me tell you—

SIR HARRY. That she is primping herself to show to the best advantage while delivering her customery sermon on the improprieties of the husbands of Bath in general, and—Ha, ha, ha! and a certain one in particular, whom it is needless to name.

PEGGY. I am on an errand, sir.

SIR HARRY. (*Mysteriously*) So am I, on a very doubtful one. So she is really in a pet with me this morning, eh?

PEGGY. I am in a hurry, sir.

SIR HARRY. So am not I, Peggy.

PEGGY. I'm going for the cherry-brandy, sir.

SIR HARRY. The cherry-brandy! Not for thyself, I'll be sworn. These cheeks do not owe their tint to cherry-brandy. Come, my dear, my morning salutation. Obediently—obediently. (*He draws her to him and after a few aversions of her head, she offers him her lips. He kisses*

her loudly.) As small boy, I never passed ripe cherries without stealing. Ha, ha, ha!

PEGGY. Hush, Sir Harry!

SIR HARRY. Why? Oh, yes, that was a smacker. Ha, Ha, but that one was for form's sake, now; one for friendship, a low soft one, all for your own pretty self. Come—come—come. (She allows him to kiss her on the lips again.)

PEGGY. Fie, Sir Harry! you mustn't do it.

SIR HARRY. Why not? Where's the wrong? Is it not an old family custom, as the tinker said as he kissed his donkey.

PEGGY. Please let me pass, sir. My mistress—

SIR HARRY. Hush! Peggy, my dear! I am going to prophecy, but first, I must cross your palm with a piece of silver—mysteriously, as the old fortune-telling witches do it. (He puts a silver coin in Peggy's hand and closes it) One fine morning, a morning full of the scent of flowers and the songs of birds, and yourself looking as pretty as the morn, some fine lad—may I guess his name? (Peggy shakes her head) Well, this fine lad on that happy morn will be calling you mistress—Ha!—Somebody. And you will both go over the stile and birds and bells for a full five miles around Bath will tell of the happy fate of old Sir Harry Pettewood's pretty maid. Ho, ho, ho! I know what I know!

PEGGY. I'm not listening to you, sir.

SIR HARRY. Oh, yes you are, Peggy.

PEGGY. Please, please, let me go, sir. My mistress will be furious.

SIR HARRY. So am not I—furious to let you go.

PEGGY. Sir, she needs her cherry-brandy.

SIR HARRY. O, she does, does she? But, that's a cosmetic for the nose, not for the cheeks.

PEGGY. (At the end of her patience, with both hands on her hips) If you please, sir, won't you let me go?

SIR HARRY. (*Mimicking her*) If you please, fair maid, I had better, or I'll have the Lady Constance peeping out and catching me kissing you a third time.

(*Peggy runs past him and out by door, left.*)

Gad! A cheerful lusty maid! And a pair of very trim ankles. Ho, ho! How they took out of the linen-closet when—

(*Enter LADY CONSTANCE, right.*)

Um, um! Good morning, my dear! (*He goes to greet her with a kiss, but she turns away and coughs very emphatically*) Um-m-m! I admit, my dear, that possibly my breath is none of the sweetest this morning. That demn'd wine I drank last night at my Lord Wishful's would poison a tortoiseshell—(*She coughs again very significantly; he pauses, looks at her rather enquiringly and then proceeds, weighing his words with caution*) I said, my love, it would poison our tortoiseshell cat.

LADY CON. Oh!

SIR HARRY. May I not, sweetheart?—Your hand,

(*She turns to him and offers her hand to be kissed, in forced gaiety, but she cannot hide the tinge of sarcasm in her speech.*)

LADY CON. Lud! You are easily satisfied this morning, Sir Harry.

SIR HARRY. I am—(*He again pauses and eyes her suspiciously*) am I? Er, well, Connie, even out of Lent the anchorite must be satisfied with lenten fare.

LADY CON. Except when forbidden pantries are to be plundered.

SIR HARRY. O, my angel! My schoolboy appetite for jams and preserves has fled me long ago.

LADY CON. Indeed!! (*She stresses fully the word*) There are other loves forbidden beside pantry ones.

SIR HARRY. Yes, yes, yes, my dear. I have heard somewhere, at sometime, of such ones.

LADY CON. Indeed!! Only heard of such ones?

SIR HARRY. Well, my dear Connie, between our two selves and the fire-screen—(*He makes towards her, but she politely repels him with upraised hand*) Well, well, havn't we had some slight experience apart from cupboard love?

LADY CON. Hem! When summer is passing, home pastures no longer boast the flaming colours of spring.

SIR HARRY. Ho, ho! We are poetic this morning. I get you, Connie, and have at you this: True love never never stale.

LADY CON. Indeed!!

SIR HARRY. (*Suspiciously*) Dem-me!

LADY CON. Harry!

SIR HARRY. (*Flustered*) I beg your pardon, Connie, but you have used that irritating word on three distinct—

LADY CON. You counted?

SIR HARRY. Yes, three—three times. Yes, I'm sure it was three times within the last three minutes.

LADY CON. Ind—Well, sir, continue.

SIR HARRY. (*Still flustered*) Continue what? Oh, ah, well, yes. I said, I was contending with my Lord Wishfull only last night on this point and holding my own very well indeed, although, I must admit he produced some alarming arguments and some Bath cases in support of his contrary contention.

LADY CON. (*Interested*) Oh, ind—He did, did he? And you?

SIR HARRY. I? Why, of course, I stood pat in my contention that true affection never stale.

LADY CON. Ind—Indeed! Then, on the next occasion when you argue with the Lord Wishful, please present him with this argument.

(*From her bosom, she takes Wishful's pink letter and hands it to Sir Harry*

without perceiving her error; she had intended to hand him his own blue note. Sir Harry opens and scans the letter in astonishment while she repeats in a sing-song manner):

“Gloves of damask for Lydia dear;
Chinee scarf for Amander sweet;
Tortoise-shell comb for Lesbia coy!”

(Sir Harry is attempting to scratch his head with wig awry.)

SIR HARRY. What the devil does this mean, madam?

LADY CON. Gloves for Lydia, scarf for Amander, comb for Lesbia.

SIR HARRY. *(Hot and angry)* Lydia, Amander and Lesbia can go to the hottest place in—in the Bath waters. There is nought of them in this. Not a syllable. You are in this, madam, you yourself. A love letter, as Pagan a one as was ever penned. Yes, madam, and a rendezvous—

(Lady Constance sees the letter in her husband's hand and draws the blue note from her bosom to satisfy her sense of sight; she then collapses on the sofa.)

LADY CON. *(Feebly)* Lud, lud! I've given him the letter. Peggy, Peggy, the brandy! *(She gives a slight hysterical cry as she sees PEGGY appear at the door.)* The brandy!

PEGGY. O, my dear dear lady! what ever is the matter? What has he done?

LADY CON. A little more brandy.

(Peggy has run across to her mistress, poured out some brandy from the bottle she has brought in, into a wine glass, for her mistress to sip. Sir Harry has seated himself on the chair, left C., and is taking copious pinches of snuff, occasionally casting a glance at the scene at the sofa. He plainly shows his disgust. After Lady Constance has taken sundry sips, coughed over the process,

been patted on the back and hands by the attentive Peggy, who accompanies her attentions with a series of sympathetic "O's," she hands Peggy the blue note.)

LADY CON. (Still feebly) Give—give that to that traitor, Peggy.

PEGGY. Certainly, ma'am. (Hands the note to Sir Harry, with her usual curtsey) With my mistress's compliments, sir.

SIR HARRY. (Handing her the pink letter) Give that to that traitress, Peggy.

PEGGY. (Handing the pink letter to her mistress) With my master's compliments, ma'am. (She curtseys)

(Lady Constance immediately tears the pink letter into fragments and throws them from her backward. Peggy is caught in the shower and in backing away she is again caught in the shower of fragments of the blue note which Sir Harry, imitating his wife, has torn up.)

PEGGY. How does your ladyship feel now? (Pause) Will you not take some air? (Pause) Do you need a little more brandy?

SIR HARRY. Give her a hogshead. (Murmuring)

LADY CON. (Waving Peggy aside and sniffing) Harry. (Sniff) There was something else (Sniff) your base Wishful (Sniff) sent along with his monstrous letter—(Sniff) a present.

SIR HARRY. Hah! Favours follow presents.

LADY CON. It was a box. (Sniff) What it contained, I havn't the slightest idea (Sniff) You will see it on the street—I threw it immediately out of the window.

SIR HARRY. Oh! (He rises and walks over to the window, glances out and then turns to her) False woman! Box me with no boxes, for there are none there.

LADY CON. Harry, you are mistaken. It is there. It must be there. I threw it out as you came up the stairs.

(She and Peggy run to the window and look out. They draw in their heads, look at one another with faces marked with disappointment and hold up their hands.)

SIR HARRY. *(Watching their movements and taking a huge pinch of snuff)* Um-m-m. A box—the box, the box that went out as I came in. Can't you see it?—no? of course, you can't see it, he was there waiting for the answer—he caught it. It will do for another.

LADY CON. *(Coming down right)* No, no, no, Harry! I swear I threw it out. I threw the hateful thing out in my anger.

SIR HARRY. Oh, indeed! but, his pagan letter you stowed away in your bosom.

LADY CON. I did not know what I was doing; his impudence embarrassed me completely.

SIR HARRY. Ha! Er—indeed! !

LADY CON. I tell you, Harry, I hid it in my confusion—

SIR HARRY. And I tell you, madam, you hid it in your bosom.

LADY CON. Peggy, Peggy, tell him—tell him the truth.

SIR HARRY. Ho, ho, ho! So our Peggy is to take on the role of Madam Verite,—Madam Verite of Bath. *(Takes her hand and leads her down)* Come forth from thy deep dark well, Madam Verite! Truly Truth has a habit of bobbing up from strange dark places. Now Peggy, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but—Well, come along out with it.

PEGGY. *(Centre, in much confusion, uncertain how many curtseys she should make, either to him or to her mistress before she commences)* Yes—yes, sir. Yes, Sir Harry, the truth and nothing but the tr— *(She holds up her hand)* the truth, the whole—

SIR HARRY. O, Peggy, don't be a flincher. Get along with it. Never mind the varnish.

PEGGY. Mm-me-L-Lord Wishful he gave me a guinea and a letter and a box—

SIR HARRY. And a kiss.

PEGGY. (*Protesting*) But—but, I didn't want him to, sir.

SIR HARRY. (*Sceptically*) No!

PEGGY. And—and I brought them up here to my mistress.

SIR HARRY. Indeed! The letter, the box, the guinea and the kiss.

PEGGY. No, no, sir, only the letter and the box were for my mistress. I put the guinea into my taffeta pocket.

(*She shows a little green taffeta pocket under her skirt.*)

SIR HARRY. (*Admiring it*) Very pretty. (*Suddenly recovering himself*) But, the kiss—the kiss what become of that? That never went into the taffeta pocket? Did you bring that to your mistress?

PEGGY. No, no, sir. That was mine, sir.

SIR HARRY. In your haste, as you ran up stairs—to bring her the letter and the box, maybe, it fell off.

PEGGY. Ye—yes, sir. O, sir, I don't know what became of it.

SIR HARRY. Ha, Madam Verite, but I do! There it is, still on your cheek. (*Peggy raises her left hand to her cheek*) Yes, you can feel it on your left cheek. Ho, ho! Peggy! it isn't mine! I never kiss our maids on the cheek, never, always on the lips. (*He makes as if he would kiss her.*)

LADY CON. (*Rising from sofa*) Harry!

SIR HARRY. (*Goes over to her and places his hands on her shoulders, gently forcing her down on the sofa again.*) Hush, madam, you interrupt the court. According to the terms of the articles set forth, etc. Peggy,—ahem! Madam Verite, is to tell the truth.

-(Lady Constance sinks down on sofa and Sir Harry takes his position between her and Peggy, R.)

PEGGY. (A little bold) I assure you, sir, my mistress did not know Lord Wishful had sent her the letter or box until I told—

SIR HARRY. The truth?

PEGGY. Yes, Sir Harry, it is the truth, the gospel truth. Then my mistress became angry with me for bringing them to her and she threw the box out of the window and—

SIR HARRY. O! She was angry with the box?

PEGGY. Yes, sir.

SIR HARRY. And she was angry with you?

PEGGY. Yes, sir.

SIR HARRY. Then why didn't she throw you out of the window after the box?

PEGGY. Oh—o—o, sir.

SIR HARRY. She was afraid he might run away with you as she did with the box?

PEGGY. Yes, sir. (Curtsey) Oh—o, no, sir. I'm sure it wasn't he—it must have been some thief run off with it.

SIR HARRY! Well, well, go on!

PEGGY. Then—then she raved about Lord Wishful—

SIR HARRY. Raved about his love for her or hers for him?

PEGGY. I didn't mean that, sir. She raved about his falseness to you, his friend, and his baseness to her, your wife.

SIR HARRY. And am I to believe this?

SIR HARRY. (Going across to down L.) Then it comes from Beelzebub's own smoking hot gospel.

PEGGY. (Following him down) No, no, sir, not from his.

SIR HARRY. (Turning on her) I say it does, dem-me! You she-Mercury of the Nether-world! (He follows her up centre and she retreating). Here is a test of your truth, minx. Have you not told your mistress that I never have kissed you—except at mistletoe time?

PEGGY. (*Downcast*) Yes, sir.

SIR HARRY. Never armed you about the waist?

PEGGY. Yes, sir.

SIR HARRY. Never twitched aside your skirt playfully for a peep of your pretty ankle?

PEGGY. Yes, sir.

SIR HARRY. (*Mimicking her*) Yes, sir. Hah, Madam Virte, I knew you had, even though I have done all these things under privilege of an old family custom. What a plague! Crush me!

PEGGY. (*Feebly, as she curtseys*) Y—yes, sir. (*She goes back to table.*)

(*LADY CONSTANCE rises*)

LADY CON. Harry!

SIR HARRY. Ugh!

LADY CON. (*Comes forward*) Every word Peggy has told you is the gospel truth.

SIR HARRY. Indeed! Then it is Belzebub's very own.

LADY CON. Harry, when you are calm—

SIR HARRY. Dem—me, madam, I am calm.

LADY CON. When you are quite calm, Harry.

SIR HARRY. Ugh!

LADY CON. Harry, you can never believe that I could give this vile Wishful occasion or encouragement to write such a mad, such a sad thing. Ah, you must believe me, Harry. You are aware how utterly I detest the fop.

SIR HARRY. (*Looking keenly at her.*) I thought I was, Connie.

LADY CON. In your heart, Harry, you know it right well. Why should he put this thing on me? Ah!—Harry, did you not say you were in dispute with him last night about constancy in love?

SIR HARRY. I did. A demn'd hot dispute.

LADY CON. I see it all. Depend upon it, Harry, there lies the reason.

SIR HARRY. The reason—how lies it?

LADY CON. His attempt to make me his conquest is but a means to another end.

SIR HARRY. End. What end?

LADY CON. To crush your argument by my hoped-for surrender to his wily blandishments and then to hold you up to ridicule before all the bucks and beaux of Bath.

SIR HARRY. Zounds, Connie! The rogue is quite equal to it. Um—m—m. it might be the case.

LADY CON. (*Winningly*). Can you not see it is? Harry, do not let passion blind your better sense. Isn't his plot quite plain to you now?

SIR HARRY. Well, my dear,—um—m—m, not quite plainly plain.

LADY CON. Whom would you rather believe, Harry, this slanderous fop, Wishful, or your own constant Constance?

SIR HARRY. Upon my honour—

LADY CON. Upon her honour? (*Beaming upon him*)

SIR HARRY. (*Beaming back at her*) Well, of course, my dear, if not in her honour then there is mighty little honour left in the city of Bath for Sir Harry Pettiwood to believe in. (*She has put her head on his shoulder and he is kissing her.*) You kitten!

(*Peggy has taken up the tray and is preparing to steal away from this happy scene.*)

LADY CON. (*Suddenly disengaging herself*) Stay, Sir Harry. I was forgetting.

SIR HARRY. Well, what now? (*Peggy puts down the tray again on the table with a crash, expecting new developments. Sir Harry looks around at her enquiringly*)

LADY CON. Sir Harry, I have a rather sharp bone to pick with you. A short time ago, you said that favours follow presents. (*Sir Harry nods.*) Why then do you buy gloves, for Lydia, scarves for Amander and combs for Lesbia?

SIR HARRY. Ho, ho! So there lies the cause of your pet with me, eh? Jealous were you almost to a green sickness on account of that innocent blue note of mine. Ha, ha, ha!

LADY CON. More than jealous—frantic on your account, Harry.

SIR HARRY. My account?

will

LADY CON. Do not jest, Harry. I know why you gave those presents if ever my head is to touch your pillow again. Harry, will you not tell me—truthfully! even if it is the very worst?

SIR HARRY. Hah, hah, hah! It's all very simple, my love. The very worst and the very best of the matter is—O, you can verify my words yourself—(*Turning to Peggy*) Oh, no, not from Madam Verite there—but from any of the saunterers on the Tile-Walk this afternoon. You must know that season after season, as regular as the sun, the moon and the milkyway, these three gentlewomen have honoured Bath with their attendance, but, Bath like a churl, has failed to honour and reward their patience with the matches they have sighed for, year by year. So the feeling beaux made up a subscription and deputed me to select a few trifles suitable for—

LADY CON. (*Softly*) These crocodiles.

SIR HARRY. Eh?

LADY CON. Go on, sir.

SIR HARRY. Well, 'twas certainly a most whimsical device,—to buy presents for these old spinsters, whose charms have lost their market, for now they can never hope to become good motherly gentlemen, but must be content to remain—

LADY CON. (*Louder*) Mere crocodiles.

SIR HARRY. What did you say?

LADY CON. Three ancient crocodiles that infest the virtuous waters of Bath.

SIR HARRY. Tut, tut, tut! Come, come Connie!

LADY CON. It is all right, Harry. I have forgiven them—that is, as far as one woman can forgive another.

SIR HARRY. Where there is nothing done amiss to forgive. (*Peggy coughs slightly*) He looks at his watch) Ha, Peggy! my girl it is now noon. You may now take away the breakfast things,—but, leave the cherry-brandy. We may need that for the complexion of our noses.

(*He goes over to the door, left and opens it for her. The Lady Constance reseats herself on sofa.*)

SIR HARRY. (*Takes up a small slice of toast from the tray*) No. (*Drops it on the tray again.*) There is here a love far far higher than the greatest of all the great pantry ones of the immortal Gargantua!

(Peggy curtseys to him with tray in hands and when she is passing out looks back at him with a smile, this he acknowledges with a slight bow. After he has closed the door, he turns and looks towards his wife. With outstretched arms and a prolonged "Hah!" he advances until he has reached the centre of the stage when

—the CURTAIN falls.

When five seconds have elapsed, the curtain rises to discover Sir Harry reclining on the sofa with Lady Constance in his arms and holding her fingers as he repeats:

"This little pig went a-courtin';
This little pig strayed from home;
This big pig got all the love
And little pig Wishful got none!"

They are both laughing heartily as Peggy opens the door and peeps in and—

—the FINAL CURTAIN falls—